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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the issues surrounding the status of latchkey programs in the United States. These issues include concerns about the responsibilities and roles of parents, schools, and community agencies in providing care for latchkey children, the types of programs that need to be developed, and the types of "survival skills" curricula that need to be developed to prepare latchkey children to take care of themselves. In addition, there are psychological, physical, and developmental risks for latchkey children. To collect data on the status of latchkey programs in the fifty states, a survey questionnaire was distributed to determine the availability of latchkey programs in each state. Commonalities among responses are discussed in the following areas: (1) profile of latchkey children; (2) profile of latchkey parents; (3) types of latchkey programs; (4) demographic data base for latchkey programs; (5) factors initiating development of latchkey programs; and (6) latchkey legislation. Extensive tables in the report summarize state-by-state responses to each of these areas. Findings indicate that less than one-half of the 31 states had any form of latchkey program. Implications and recommendations based on these findings are discussed. (DST)

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LATCHKEY PROGRAMS: A RESEARCH REVIEW

by

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The children's Defense Fund has determined that fifty percent of the thirteen million children in the U.S. under the age of twelve years whose parents work will be unsupervised by an adult some period of the school day. These youngsters are known as "latchkey" children, a term coined in the eighteenth century to describe the tool used to lift the latch on a door. The term latchkey was revived during World War II to describe children who were left without adult supervision before and after school. Unlike the war plant-working mothers during World War II, the significant increase in the number of two working parent and single working parent homes, coupled with the rising divorce rate over the past twenty-five years has produced a sharp increase in the number of latchkey children.

This crisis has raised a number of issues:

1. What are the responsibilities and role of parents for the supervision of their school-age children before and after school?
2. What are the responsibilities and role of the schools for providing care for latchkey children?
3. What are the responsibilities and role of

community agencies for providing services for latchkey children?

4. What types of programs need to be developed for latchkey children?
5. What type of "survival skills" curricular needs to be developed to prepare latchkey children to take care of themselves?

In addition to these practical child-care issues, there are also psychological and physical risks and opportunities (or the lack of) for latchkey children. Research indicates the risks include negative feelings, insecurity, fear, behavioral problems, accidents, abuse and neglect. There are real developmental risks for latchkey children. They may be the new generation of socially-disadvantaged children unless child-care intervention programs and support services are provided. Although there have been few empirical studies on the effect of adult supervision vs. the lack of adult supervision on the development and school performance of latchkey children, the data suggests that children with continuous adult supervision would have fewer developmental problems than those left on their own. It is obvious that schools, parents and the community will have to address the special program

needs of latchkey children.

Problem Statement

How have educators, state legislatures and public and private educators dealt with the latchkey issue? What is the status of latchkey programs in the fifty states? This latter problem is the purpose of this study. The specific objectives of the current study were to determine:

1. What is the profile of latchkey children?
2. What is the profile of latchkey parents?
3. What is the nature (types) of programs designed for latchkey children?
4. On what kind of demographic data are latchkey programs based?
5. What kinds of data are keyed to designing latchkey programs?
6. What is the present and pending status of latchkey legislation in the fifty states?

Method of Data Collection

A self-devised questionnaire (also requesting literature) was mailed to the state department of education and the secretary of the legislature in fifty states. Of the thirty-one states that responded, only fourteen indicated they had some type of latchkey

program in their state. Content analysis was employed to evaluate the responses, letters, booklets and related documents sent by the respondents. The data were classified and coded in terms of the six general questions.

Results

The findings showed that less than one-half of the thirty-one responding states had any form of latchkey program. And most of these programs were private agency (YMCA, churches, etc.) sponsored programs, not state funded projects. Most programs were local initiatives, rather than state implemented. State department of education officials appeared to have little information on local or regional latchkey programs. They had little or no information on local or state child-care programs. Local agencies appeared to have a greater understanding of and involvement with latchkey issues and programs. An analysis of the information sent by the the respondents based on the six objectives showed that there were some commonalities as to the type of children, parents serviced, programs and demographic data employed.

Profile of Latchkey Children

A state-by-state analysis of the data as to

"what is the profile of latchkey children (in your state)?" are summarized in Table I. It shows that the characteristics of the children that would qualify for latchkey programs were:

1. From middle and low-income poverty-level families.
2. Family structure was single or two-parent career oriented.
3. Children were home alone after school--no adult supervision.
4. Children could be abused, neglected, exploited or in danger, special education children were also included.
5. Age level of minor children were from six to eighteen years.

Profile of Latchkey Parents

Responses to "what is the profile of latchkey parents (in your state)?" presented in Table II show that the common characteristics of the parents who qualify for latchkey programs were:

1. Single and/or two-career parent families.
2. Welfare or poverty family heads being trained for or seeking employment.
3. Parents could provide no after-school adult

TABLE I

CHARACTERISTICS OF LATCHKEY CHILDREN

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	children at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation special education children included.
FLORIDA	middle and low income families; primary and elementary school age children.
ILLINOIS	children at risk, need supplemental care or who require care pending return of parents or guardians.
INDIANA	YMCA Sponsored - school age children 7 - 17 no parent or supervision at home.
KENTUCKY	minors who are endangered; abused-neglected children; children who are home alone.
MAINE	home alone older children - no supervision from end of school day to 6:00 - 7:00 P.M.; day-care.
MICHIGAN	home alone older day-care children - no supervision at end of school day to 6:00 - 7:00 P.M.
MINNESOTA	older day-care elementary school children at home alone after school.
OHIO	latchkey children in need of physical and psychological safety; no supervision; ages 7- 17.
NEW JERSEY	unsupervised after school; older day-care elementary school children at home alone after school.
NEW YORK	children at risk in terms of abuse neglect or exploitation; special education children included.
RHODE ISLAND	unsupervised after school children ages 6 - 17; home alone children.
VIRGINIA	unsupervised after school children ages 6 - 17; home alone children.
WISCONSIN	children at risk - drop outs, minority, single-parent (working) - children at home alone.

TABLE II

CHARACTERISTICS OF LATCHKEY PARENTS

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	family in need of child care services need protective service; employed or seeking job.
FLORIDA	both parents working or single parent working middle or low income.
ILLINOIS	employed parents or engaged in other activities requiring absence from home.
INDIANA	low income families - most are single parent households; both parents work.
KENTUCKY	low income families - working parents; most families are single parent households.
MAINE	working single parents - households headed by women; 48 percent live in poverty.
MICHIGAN	working parents; most families are single parent households.
MINNESOTA	poor parents; two parents or single parent work can provide no after school child supervision.
OHIO	working or parents seeking work; both single and two-parent families.
NEW JERSEY	poor parents - single or two-career households can provide no after school child supervision.
NEW YORK	employed or seeking employment - in need of child care services.
RHODE ISLAND	parents working or seeking work
VIRGINIA	parents working or seeking work; parents of abused or neglected children.
WISCONSIN	working single or two-parent families; middle or low income.

supervision for their children.

4. Could include temporarily ill parents.

Types of Latchkey Programs

The third objective asked the question "what is the nature (type) of programs designed for latchkey children (in your state)?" The responses in Table III seem to indicate that the programs were local, private sponsored and day-care:

1. Generally an extension of preschool education (ages 1-6).
2. Many were volunteer-based (YMCA, church, boys clubs, etc.); a small fee of $15.00 to $20.00 a week was charged.
3. The content of the programs was basically social, recreational and some academic activities, e.g., help with homework, library and reading type activities and survival skill curriculum.
4. Others included discussions on how latchkey children could survive--activities at home, "phone-a-friend," "block houses" (a place of safety) and "home alone training."
5. Others included parental education workshops to help their latchkey children and

TABLE III

NATURE OR TYPE OF LATCHKEY PROGRAMS

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	extended day school services, can use contracted agencies; held in public schools or contracted.
FLORIDA	child care, volunteer after school programs, school-based school age child care programs.
ILLINOIS	homework, physical exercise, snacks, additional educational offerings; held in public schools.
INDIANA	latchkey - 2:30 to 6:00 P.M. after school - reading to sports, arts, play - (parent workshop).
KENTUCKY	local - YMCA sponsored and run after school 2:00 - 6:00 P.M. (summer 6:00 A.M. - 6:00 P.M.); $15.00 per week.
MAINE	child care, home alone training, child protection, assist working parents; train on child care issue.
MICHIGAN	housed in public schools - continuation of academic and recreational activities.
MINNESOTA	pending day-care for older children; academic/social/ recreational.
OHIO	nonspecific - based on local needs with peer socialization, recreation and homework assistance.
NEW JERSEY	general before and after school day-care programs.
NEW YORK	general day-care services.
RHODE ISLAND	academic/recreational YMCA sponsored programs with local public schools - not state-wide.
VIRGINIA	information not available.
WISCONSIN	"phone-a-friend," "working parent hotline," "after school day-care" and "latchkey survival" skills.

child-care training.

6. Most of the programs were located in not-for-profit, private agencies in particularly--the YMCA and church. Very few appeared to use public school facilities after school. However, there appears a changing trend toward the use of public schools.
7. Many of the programs appeared to be designated as continual day-care, rather than latchkey, "per se."
8. Latchkey programs were local rather than state wide.

Demographic Data Base for Latchkey Programs

The sample used a variety of demographic data bases for developing latchkey programs (see Table IV). Some of the respondents relied on general local needs and problems, facilitated by community pressures to resolve the problems of vandalism, gangs, neglect, child abuse and related juvenile-related issues. The findings show data:

1. To be based more on national than local surveys and sources.
2. There were few local studies. Rhode Island,

TABLE IV

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA EMPLOYED TO ESTABLISH LATCHKEY PROGRAMS

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	number of women in labor force, number of children ages 5 - 14 years, and number of families on ADC with dependent children.
FLORIDA	no formal studies, local community information; presently preparing a report.
ILLINOIS	based on state and local needs - to provide before and after school care for employed parents and guardians who are absent from home after school.
INDIANA	none specifically - local community needs and needs of home alone children.
KENTUCKY	no local demographic data, relying on public opinion - community/parental input.
MAINE	local survey; two-thirds of parents are women with children under 13 years are working or seeking work; 500 five-year olds home alone; 5 state-wide programs.
MICHIGAN	Michigan State Department of Education does not collect information on latchkey children. The information was collected at local levels.
MINNESOTA	not indicated - except community/school/parental pressures and publicity.
OHIO	national demographic data of 5.2 million latchkey children.
NEW JERSEY	based on national data and reports - SACC.
NEW YORK	survey data from New York Council on Children and Families.
RHODE ISLAND	community action committee conducted a 4,429 family survey, 337 families needed after school care for their children.
VIRGINIA	not indicated.
WISCONSIN	needs of working parents and home-alone children; none specifically, but need to help children at risk.

New York and Maine appeared to be the only ones that relied on a local needs-assessment-data-base.

3. Many or most used national data from the School-Age Child Care Project was based on Wellesby College, national and local conferences on latchkey children and national publications.
4. The data included: number of working parents, number of unsupervised children at home after school, number of single parents and two-career families.
5. Local pressure appeared to derive from the increased number of unsupervised children in the streets, vandalism, gang-related problems, crime, drug use, child abuse, neglect, etc. Public opinions also played a role.
6. Reduction in federal funding for city-sponsored, school-sponsored programs for youth was cited by some of the respondents.

Data That Keyed Program Development

A concern of this study was to determine which

factors or type of data keyed the development of latchkey programs. The results in Table V show some common factors:

1. General community/parental pressure to do something to resolve the problem of home-alone children.
2. The alarming increase in the number of single and working parents.
3. In terms of the specific latchkey programs curricula and activities, the goal was to meet the social, psychological and interest needs of the children.
4. An overriding factor appeared to be to "get them off the streets" and into a safe, adult-supervised and constructive haven.
5. The programs appeared to be an extension of school activities, but with less emphasis on academics.

Latchkey Legislation

The commitment to and success of latchkey programs are dependent upon state legislatures. Without mandatory of permissive latchkey legistation, the number of after-school programs for unsupervised children will at best be minimal. Home-alone children

TABLE V

DATA KEY TO DESIGNING SUCCESSFUL LATCHKEY PROGRAMS

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	based on day-care type programs; needs of community.
FLORIDA	general need of increased number of poverty and single parents.
ILLINOIS	based on day-care, recreational, and educational needs of children Kindergarten - 6th grade, local community level.
INDIANA	social/recreational interest of children, arts/crafts, sports - not academically inclined.
KENTUCKY	based on child's day-care and schooling needs.
MAINE	reduction in federal funding; increase in number of working mothers; need for quality child care.
MICHIGAN	Michigan State Department of Education does not collect latchkey information. Done on local levels.
MINNESOTA	no specific data - input from school officials and community.
OHIO	none indicated - based on national information.
NEW JERSEY	needs of community and families/children - stop drug use, vandalism, crime, etc.
NEW YORK	Governor's push for school-community partnerships. State funds for private (non-profit) government agencies.
RHODE ISLAND	based on needs of community, children and families.
VIRGINIA	based on needs of community, children and families.
WISCONSIN	awareness of children at risk and community pressure for latchkey "help" programs.

will be at continuous risk as their number increases. Table VI shows that only fourteen states indicated the legal status of latchkey programs. A summary of the present and pending status of latchkey programs is as follows:

1. Only Illinois (at the time of this study) had passed legislation specifically for "latchkey" children.
2. California and New Jersey had two bills, the former waiting for the signature of the governor (had been vetoed previously) and the latter has two bills waiting for a "floor vote." Nebraska has pending legislation.
3. Some of the states, e.g., Montana, Ohio, Wisconsin and others are relying on general day-care legislation and statutes on child-welfare and abused, neglected and abandoned children.
4. The legal basis of most of the latchkey programs is local policy and resolutions. State departments of education in Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maine, New York and Wisconsin have taken the lead and encouraged

TABLE VI

PRESENT AND/OR PENDING STATUS OF LATCHKEY LEGISLATION

STATES	RESPONSES
CALIFORNIA	pending legislation; SB 303 waiting signature.
FLORIDA	no legislation.
ILLINOIS	passed latchkey legislation; effective July 1, 1984.
INDIANA	no state legislation.
KENTUCKY	no latchkey legislation; rely on minor statutes.
MAINE	no legislation; developed by task force.
MICHIGAN	no legislation.
MINNESOTA	no pending legislation; only sex abuse legislation.
OHIO	attempt to introduce legislation.
NEW JERSEY	two latchkey bills pending - no floor vote yet.
NEW YORK	no legislation - governor support.
RHODE ISLAND	no state legislation - only local resolutions.
VIRGINIA	recommendations to be presented to legislation.
WISCONSIN	no legislation.

and assisted local jurisdictions in establishing latchkey programs, particularly those that are associated with and housed in the public schools.

Reported school-age child care (SACC) type programs in cities and counties are:

1. Fairfax County, Virginia (45)
2. Santa Monica, California
3. Lincoln, Nebraska (pending legislation)
4. Oak Park, Illinois
5. Nashville Tennessee
6. Palm Beach County, Florida
7. Minneapolis, Minnesota (Committee Education Department)
8. Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida
9. Houston, Texas (Houston individual school districts, 2000 children)
10. New Orleans Public Schools, New Orleans, Louisiana
11. Erie County Public Schools, New York
12. Kansas City, Missouri - (worked with four school districts)
13. Madison, Wisconsin

Summary

The results indicated that few programs are available for latchkey children. Of the thirty-one responses, only one state has passed legislation and others have permissive policies regarding latchkey programs, while some states are in the process of proposing legislations. Fourteen of the states responding gave similar responses. Generally their programs were extensions of day-care rather than latchkey "per se" and were basically social and recreational in nature with some academic activities, such as, reading and homework assistance. Many programs involved teaching home-alone children survival skills, such as: "phone-a-friend," "safe-houses," and "home-alone-training."

Most programs were located in and operated by private, non-profit agencies, such as, the YMCA or churches. Very few had parental education workshops that would increase parents' awareness as to the risks that latchkey children face.

Only one of the fourteen states (Illinois) has actually passed latchkey legislation, although it is permissive. Most states relied on general day-care legislation and statutes on child-welfare, abused,

neglected and abandoned children. The legal basis for most of the latchkey programs was local policies and resolutions. A few of the states encouraged local jurisdictions to establish latchkey programs, especially those associated with the public schools.

The data were difficult to interpret. Many of the states gave incomplete information to the following questions: the number of school-age children cared for under their programs, the number of after school programs, whether the programs included non-school day or summer care. A majority of state officials surveyed did not have data on the number and kind of school-age child-care programs. Nor did they have data on the number and location of available school-age child-care centers. Latchkey children were from all socio-economic levels. Fees were based on ability to pay.

Conclusion

The home-alone child is national in scope. Stewart (1981) noted that the problem is international in scope. After-school-care is a universal need, but no country provides adequate space or even have data indicating where school-age children are being cared for. Long, in an article in the Sun-Times on April 28, 1985, argued that business and community leaders must

find a solution to the dilemma of the nation's latchkey children who are facing many psychological problems. Fear is the problem most often quoted by home-alone children.

Dali (1982) believed that care outside of the home could offer latchkey children opportunities for cognitive growth that many parents may not be able to provide. And there is little information on how school-age child-care allows parents to pursue career goals and ways in which child-care outside of the home would affect the family.

The latchkey situation is a social problem and there are many risks for these children, especially for children in urban areas. Latchkey children are more likely to be victims of accidents and sexual attacks by siblings and nonparental adults (Garbarino 1981). To reduce the risks to latchkey children, latchkey programs must be expanded. The programs need the support of public officials. Resolutions must come from all levels of government, not just from the "grassroots" or local community levels.

Implications

The findings also indicate that state officials are becoming increasingly aware of the need for

latchkey programs. Unfortunately, however, many state departments of education have not recognized the problem of home-alone children, collected data or conducted research, educated school officials and faculty and the public about the latchkey problem and established programs for latchkey children in the public schools.

The findings seem to suggest that even at the local level, very few school districts have established or helped to establish before and after-school programs for home-alone children. Instead, local agencies (YMCA, churches, civic and community groups, etc.) have taken the initiative to establish latchkey-care programs. It has been an individual, private, grassroots and not-for-profit organization effort rather than governmental. National and urban organizations such as "The School-Age Child-Care Project" and "The Child Abuse Prevention Program" have, in many cases, been the catalyst for latchkey conferences, policies, pending legislations and ultimately programs. It will be through these private, national and local levels that the latchkey program movement will take hold nationally.

Recommendations

The power of the states to set their own standards and enforcement methods for child-care services was given to them by the federal government in 1981. The issue of unsupervised children has been a concern for many decades. This issue is receiving more attention as the increased number of single-parents and two-parent households must work for economic reasons. Because of this and the results of this study, the following recommendations should be implemented:

1. Each state should conduct a needs assessment survey on the need for after-school child-care programs.
2. Local officials should undertake a study designed to determine the number of alternative programs available for the school-age child-care population.
3. The state legislature should take immediate actions to pass state laws or policies mandating continuous adult supervision for school-age children.
4. Local and state officials should cooperate with "grassroots" organizations to develop and implement alternative child-care

programs.

5. The community and education leaders should undertake the planning of programs that include the use of public school facilities for after-school programs.
6. The program developers should develop workshop-inservice programs for parents to motivate their acceptance of latchkey programs and increase their awareness of the risks these children, as well as the community, face.

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